

To: House Committee on Education
From: Venus Barnes, Oregon City, Oregon
RE: Oral Testimony provided in support of HB2590
Date: March 4, 2021

Madame Chair, and members of the committee,

For the record my name is Venus Barnes and I am the Community Food Justice Organizer at Hunger-Free Oregon. I am here today in support of HB2590.

I experienced hunger as a single parent college student in 2017. I escaped an extremely abusive marriage with the help of the DV grant through DHS and enrolled into Portland Community College. I had a dream of becoming a nurse and caring for people in my community. I began my educational career with only what I fled with, my children, our car and what I could fit in a bag.

It was a difficult first year, I lost 30 lbs due to the fact I was actually starving. I skipped meals so my kids could eat. I was homeless so I had to split my kids up who were 18mo and 12 at the time. When I did get my own place after 2 yrs of living there I was faced with the reality of being homeless yet again. Like most Oregonians, substantial rent hikes were essentially pushing us out of our home.

Rent was paid from my financial aid budget. I could not attend Summer term because I had no money for child care. Eventually, I had to choose between my education or being homeless again, so I dropped out. Our State and Federal government priorities do not cover parents that are college students. This is not an uncommon situation for BIPOC students. I don't come from generational wealth, and I didn't have support or the resources I needed in order to succeed.

By leaving BIPOC students behind, Oregon is losing talent, losing innovation, losing money. If we look at this from a financial point of view, integrating diversity only enhances, advances and excels a culture. It's a tragic event that we just willfully sit by and allow students to fall through the cracks and then not create policies in order to help. Society cannot go anywhere without Us. And if society does, it's at a fraction compared to a thriving and diverse culture we all deserve.

Please pass **HB2590**. Thank you for your time.